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Scottish Bird News

No 70 Dec. 2003

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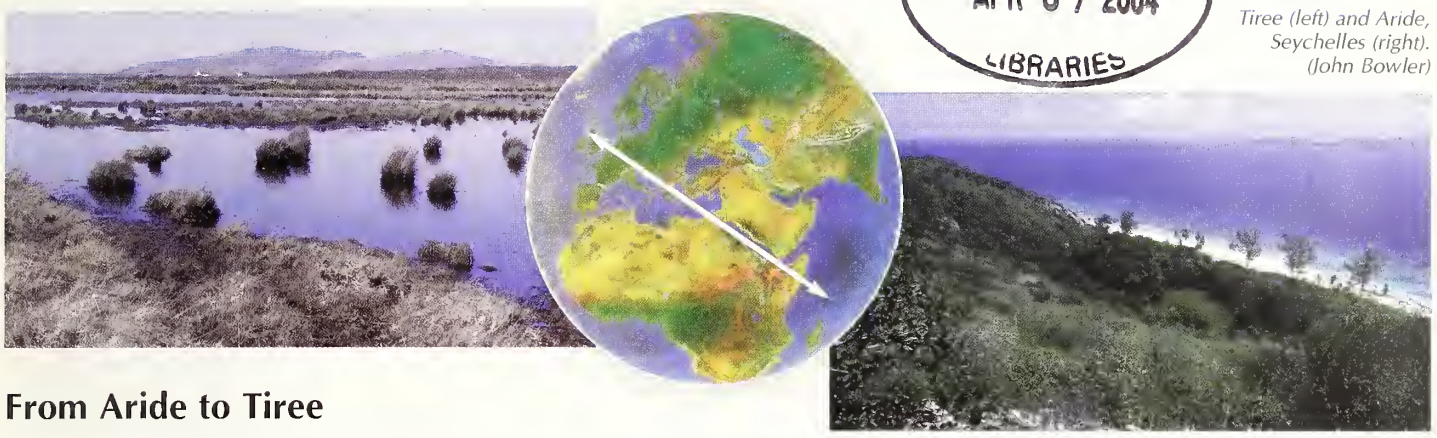

Tiree (left) and Aride, Seychelles (right). (John Bowler)

From Aride to Tiree

Few of us have the chance to experience two totally isolated wildlife communities on opposite sides of the globe. John Bowler has! Read on...

It takes at least three days of air-flights to travel from Aride Island, Seychelles to Tiree in the Inner Hebrides. The two islands would seem to be quite different in terms of size, character, habitats and not least climate, yet they hold many ornithological parallels. Having spent three years managing Aride Island Nature Reserve for the Royal Society for Nature Conservation, and over two years working as Tiree Conservation Officer for RSPB, I feel that I have come to know both islands reasonably well in terms of their birdlife and the birding that they have to offer.

At just one mile long and a quarter of mile wide, Aride is much smaller than the 10 mile by 3 mile island of Tiree, but it is easier to get lost on its' steep thickly forested slopes than in the open machair and moors of Tiree. Obviously, Aride is rather warmer than Tiree, but the latter does have the reputation of being the sunniest place in Scotland, if not Britain, and on calmer summer days, it is not impossible to feel a tropical vibe on Tiree. Both islands have white sandy beaches, azure seas and more than their fair share of breeding seabirds.

The 1,300 pairs of Roseate Terns on Aride comprise the largest remaining population of the species in the Indian Ocean. Poaching of eggs elsewhere in Seychelles has decimated the species and yet it is sobering to think that in some years more Roseates still breed on the tiny island of Aride than in the whole of Europe! The shrill cries of the Roseates in April rise above the din of the other species of tern nesting in the native hill woodland of Aride. Some 650,000 pairs of six species of tern breed on Aride, including up to 435,000 pairs of Sooty Tern, where uniquely they nest on the woodland floor. 190,000 pairs of Lesser Noddy and 10,000 pairs of Fairy Tern nest in the trees, whilst 10,000 pairs of Brown Noddy and 200 pairs of Bridled Tern breed on the rocks. It is tempting to think that the Bridled Tern that summered on Tiree in 1994 may have come from Aride, although the Caribbean is probably a safer bet. In the absence of rats, other ground nesting seabirds on Aride include some 1,500 pairs of White-tailed Tropicbirds, the last three pairs of Red-tailed Tropicbird in the granitic islands, 19,500 pairs of Wedge-tailed Shearwater and 57,000 pairs of Audubon's Shearwater.

Rats on Tiree and all of its offshore islets have put paid to any chances of nesting shearwaters or Storm Petrels, and of course there aren't any trees, but the familiar sounds and smells of seabird colonies are never far away. Tiree is home to some 500 pairs of Arctic Tern, 60 pairs of Little Tern and a few pairs of Common Tern, and their return in April coincides with the annual return of Roseate Terns to their breeding colonies on Aride. Inland,

Brown Noddy. (John Bowler)

there are large colonies of Herring, Common, Black-headed and both Lesser and Greater Black-backed Gulls. The rocky headland of Ceann a'Mhara holds a classic northern seabird city, with 1,400 pairs of Fulmar, 350 Razorbills, 1,900 Guillemots, 155 pairs of Shag and a handful of Tysties. Looking down at the

Razorbills. (Arthur Grosset)

cliffs on a sunny June day, the Fulmars wheeling about on the updrafts are not so unlike the marauding Frigatebirds of the Aride cliffs and on one memorable visit in May 2003, we spotted a visiting Eleonora's Falcon sitting on a cliff-ledge just as they do in November and December on Aride! Similarly, Tiree was the locality for Britain's only Ascension Frigatebird to date – interesting examples of synchronicity.

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Both islands have relatively short lists of breeding species: Tiree, on account of its windswept, treeless habitats and Aride, because of its small size and oceanic location. However, both islands are hugely important for bird conservation. Tiree hosts more Corncrakes than any other British island and holds nationally important numbers of breeding Ringed Plover and Dunlin. Surprisingly perhaps, the first two of these species have both appeared on Aride as migrants over the years.

It is the endemic breeding species that are most important on Aride. Restocking of the native forests on Aride since its inception as a nature reserve in 1976, has allowed two Seychelles endemics, the Blue Pigeon and the Seychelles Sunbird to return of their own accord. Three other species with less ability to recolonise naturally have been re-introduced in recent years. Following their re-introduction to the island in 1988, Seychelles Brush-Warblers have flourished and Aride now hosts over three-quarters of the world population. Two other endangered species, the Seychelles Fody and the Seychelles Magpie-robin, are also now breeding once again on the island, creating additional populations to aid their long-term survival.

Fairy Terns. (John Bowler)

From a birding perspective, both islands are perhaps most exciting at migration times and both, perhaps not coincidentally, have impressive lists of unexpected vagrants. A regular pastime is the daily check of the local beach to count the Turnstones and Sanderling, always with the hope that something else might turn up. Greenshank, Whimbrel, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Grey Plover and Common Sandpiper have all brightened my days on both islands, but Lesser Sandplover, Greater Sandplover and Crab Plover have yet to make it to Tiree!

Sea-watching prospects are good on both islands. Tiree's western location at the southern entrance to the Minch, means that NW gales can funnel birds along its northern shores, whilst southerlies can be equally productive from its southernmost tip. Sifting through the huge autumn movements of auks, Fulmars, Gannets and Manx Shearwaters is both enjoyable and rewarding. Sooty Shearwaters and Storm Petrels are often present in good numbers, together with regular Arctic and Great Skuas, and more occasionally, Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas, Grey Phalaropes, Leach's Petrels and Sabine's Gulls. Aride's location on the shallow Seychelles bank, means that truly oceanic migrant seabirds rarely come close to its shores. However, towards sunset, the gathering mass of locally breeding shearwaters, noddies and Sooty Terns is a tremendous spectacle in itself, and in June and July, these in turn attract the attentions of Antarctic Skuas and more rarely, South Polar and Arctic Skuas. Brown, Red-footed and Masked Boobies have all appeared from time to time, whilst vagrant terns during our stay included Crested, Lesser Crested, Black-naped and Saunder's, and as on Tiree, careful scrutiny of the tern flocks could produce a lurking Common Tern.

Aride has the bonus of an annual raptor migration in November-December. Each year, the island plays host to an array of up to seven species of falcon, often conveniently highlighted by a wheeling mob of Fairy Terns, as they circle distantly in dazzling tropical sunshine. Less conveniently, all are immature birds, providing a trying, but fun, test of identification skills to separate such similar species as Hobby, Sooty and Eleonora's Falcons, and Western Red-footed from Amur Falcons. Migrant raptors on Tiree are normally rather easier to identify, having included both Black and Red Kites, Rough-legged Buzzard, Osprey and Sea Eagle in recent years.

Tiree fares better for migrant passerines than Aride. There is an annual influx of warblers, chats and flycatchers in May and again in September, always with the chance of something special, such as a Hoopoe in spring or a Yellow-breasted Bunting in autumn. Migrant passerines were the "Holy Grail" on Aride, requiring cyclones in November to produce a subtle combination of strong NW winds to force birds crossing the Arabian Sea into the Indian Ocean, and tropical deluges to bring them down onto the island. If all these elements came together, then Aride could be rewarded with a Tree Pipit, Swallow or even a White Wagtail! On one occasion, a visiting birding friend idly mentioned a Spotted Flycatcher that he had seen – a once in a lifetime bird on Aride - which I fortunately managed to track down later. More exotic visitors during our stay included both Jacobin and Asian Lesser Cuckoos, and perhaps more mundanely, a Quail and a House Sparrow. The Quail was new for the Seychelles at the time and the House Sparrow proved to be the first recent record for the central island group!

Whooper Swans. (Arthur Grosset)

The small wetland on Aride can hardly compare with the rich machair lochs on Tiree, but its Moorhens were easier to see than their secretive Hebridean cousins, and both islands have produced fine drake Garganey in spring. However, Tiree can boast up to 7,000 wintering geese, a stirring spectacle in themselves on a winter's day and always worthy of a check for the odd Pinkfoot, Brent, Canada or Snow Goose. The larger Tiree lochs such as Loch a' Phuill and Loch Bhasapol host wintering flocks of Whooper Swans, and rafts of dabbling and diving ducks, which have held several Nearctic species in recent years including Ring-necked Duck, American Wigeon, Blue-winged Teal and American Black Duck.

Ultimately, the two islands are both fantastic places to visit, to savour their important populations of breeding birds and to search for interesting migrants. Both Aride and Tiree are benefiting from sustained conservation efforts and sensitive management, in order to ensure that this remains the case in the future, and both embrace sustainable eco-tourism.

For more information on Tiree, visit: www.isleoftiree.com Aride Island is currently managed by the Island Conservation Society based in Seychelles. For more information on migrant birds in Seychelles, visit the site of the Seychelles Bird Records Committee at: www.stokecoll.ac.uk/sbrc

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No 70 December 2003

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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 31st January 2004 to:

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NEWS & NOTICES

New Editorial Team

Well, here it is – our first combined attempt to follow in the footsteps of Mike Fraser, whose last few editions have raised the profile of *SBN* to a very high level. Mike has now begun studying for a teaching career – a very difficult job – we wish him well. We will certainly try to maintain the quality he achieved and we will certainly need your help to do it. Our magazine must reflect the membership of the SOC – your interests, your work and all the things that excite you about birds. We hope that opportunities for you to communicate news to us will be facilitated by the Regional Committee and its representatives from each Group, but in the end, individual initiative is what matters.

Our 4-man team will be keeping a watching brief on all the ornithological projects taking place in Scotland, the artistic work going on and, of course, the many SOC-based interests and developments. The latter naturally includes the building of Waterston House, which we hope is going to be a functional and beautiful seaside centre for all of us – a home we can all be proud of. We four will not be known to all of you, so there follows a very brief profile on each of us. Who knows how well we can work together to form a coherent team but we will be doing our best to make *SBN* a worthy reflection of ornithological thought and happenings in Scotland.

Brian Cartwright: In May 2002, I moved from Staffordshire and now live in a small village near Laurencekirk, Aberdeenshire having retired from business. I was a member of the West Midland Bird Club and served on its committee for two years, but since moving north, have joined the Angus & Dundee Bird Club and am editor of its "*Newsletter*". As well as the SOC, I am a member of the BTO, RSPB and the SWT. I spend some time each day birdwatching – its amazing what you see from the kitchen window!

Martin Collinson: I have lived in Scotland since 1991 and was previously Editor of *SBN* from June 2000 to June 2002. At present I am a member of the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee, convener of its Taxonomic Sub-Committee and a member of the Editorial Board of '*British Birds*' since 1998. Living in Newtonhill on the north-east coast encourages me to work hard at increasing my patch list.

Ian Francis: I live in Aberdeenshire and work for the RSPB as Area Manager for N-E Scotland. Until recently, I have been an SOC Grampian Branch committee member for seven years – also a member of Grampian Ringing Group, N-E Scotland Raptor Study Group and Chair of N-E Scotland Biological Records Centre. I am currently organising N-E Scotland Breeding Bird Atlas and am a member of the UK Rare Breeding Birds Panel. Having a keen interest in geese, I co-ordinate the Greenland White-fronted Goose census each year in Scotland.

Jimmy Maxwell: Originally from Ayrshire, I now live in Hamilton. A retired music lecturer, my last ten years has been spent more and more on birds and other wildlife – am also increasingly keen on insects and flowers. Love chamber-music. Enjoy hill-walking and sailing and my new sport of curling. Regular foreign holidays are increasingly constrained by BTO/RSPB activities often involving work at Baron's Haugh (Website maintained) and also the SOC – now a Council Member. An ongoing study of Willow Tits uses up any time left over.

Attendees at the Scottish Recorders Conference 2003 (from left to right) were: *Martin Cook (Moray & Naim), Ian Andrews (Lothian), Paul Baxter (NE Scotland), Malcolm Ogilvie (RBBP), Bernie Zonfrillo (Clyde Islands), Ron Forrester (SBRC), Andy Thorpe (NE Scotland), David Kelly (Lothian), Neil Beilby (Upper Forth), Iain Gibson (Clyde), Paul Collin (Dumfries & Galloway), Cliff Henty (Upper Forth), Angus Hogg (Ayrshire), Val Wilson (Clyde), Dave Butterfield (Highland), Alastair NcNee (Highland), Andrew Stevenson (Outer Hebrides), Jim Wilson (Clyde) and Ray Murray (Borders). Also present were Ron Youngman (Perth & Kinross), Paul Daw (Argyll) and Dan Carmichael (Angus & Dundee).*

Scottish Recorders Conference 2003

A Scottish Recorders Conference held at Stirling on 6th December 2003 was extremely productive and well-attended by recorders and reports editors. The all-day meeting allowed discussion on many Local Recorder and Local Bird Report issues, and provided an ideal opportunity to share ideas, suggestions and problems. There were also talks on the Rare Breeding Bird Panel and the Scottish Bird Records Committee.

Water birds around the World

Wetlands International are organising an international conference to review the conservation, management and research themes concerned with the world's major flyways. The "Water birds around the World " Conference is being held at Heriot Watt University from 3rd – 8th April 2004. You can find out more detail on www.wetlands.org. The Conference has many international partners. The main sponsors are the JNCC, Wetlands International and "Landbouw, naruur en voedselkwaliteit" from Holland.

The event is expected to attract about 400 research ornithologists from all over the world. SOC is assisting in the provision of birding excursions on Tuesday 6th April and other help will be required at Heriot Watt during the week. If you would like to assist in this interesting event please contact Bill Gardner at SOC HQ.

Bill Gardner SOC Development Manager

Cruises to the Shiants and North Rona in May 2004

The SOC organised two successful cruises on the *Poplar Voyager* to St Kilda in 2003 and we aim to repeat the experience by visiting North Rona and the Shiant Isles in May 2004. The trips will last seven days, leaving and returning from Kinlochbervie in Sutherland. Sailing dates are Saturday the 8th, 15th and 22nd May. The aim is to spend two days and nights at each location, going directly to North Rona on the first day. If the weather is less than perfect(!) we would take the more sheltered alternative via Handa, then across the Minch to the Shiants.

The skipper will be Bob Theakston, who has made more than 20 successful trips to Rona and as many to the Shiants. Anyone keen to join one of these cruises should contact Bob Theakston direct at; Poplar Charters, Fairview, Stockton Road, Sedgefield, Stockton on Tees TS21 3HA. Tel: 01740 620562. E-mail: bobtheakston@poplar-charters.fsnet.co.uk Updates on bookings and the availability of places will be posted regularly on the SOC website.

SOC photographic competition 2003

The results of the annual SOC Photographic Competition 2003 were announced at the Friday evening session of the Conference. The various categories had attracted 13 photographers who submitted 113 photographs. Winners in the various categories were:-

TECHNICAL – ***Best picture of a species***
1st Peregrine by Edmund Fellowes
2nd Swift by Bobby Smith
3rd Cuckoo by Gordon Yates

Also selected for special mention were: Snowy Owl by Brian Orr, Meadow Pipit by Eric Middleton and Willow Warbler by Graham Checkley

COMPOSITION – ***A picture that puts the bird in its habitat or a bird doing something typical of that species***
1st Parrot Crossbill by Harry Scott
2nd Chiffchaff by Jimmy Maxwell
3rd Dipper by Dennis Johnson

Also selected for special mention were: Water Rail and Tree Sparrow by Jimmy Maxwell and Puffin by Margaret Mylne

RARITY – ***Self-explanatory***
1st Booted Warbler by Sam Alexander
2nd Little Bunting by Harry Scott

As there were only 10 entries received for this category it was decided that only two prizes would be awarded this year.

This year's completion is the first of three (or four) to be run in connection with the new '*Birds of Scotland*' publication. I'm afraid, readers will have to wait until this is published before they see the winning photographs and many of the other entrants!

The Editorial Group would like to thank the 13 photographers who sent in a combined total of 113 slides, prints and digital pictures. The goal of illustrating all the species on the Scottish List in the new book has taken a large step forward. Anyone interested in submitting photographs for the book or next year's competition is welcome to do so.

Ian Andrews

New members

We welcome the following new members to the Club: **Ayrshire** B. Lennox, R. Lennox. **Borders** W. Johnstone. **Central Scotland** Mr. and Mrs. J. Smellie, G.J. Fraser, G.J. Riddoch. **Clyde** D. Fotheringham, J. Scrimger, Mr. and Mrs. D. Palmar. **Dumfries** A. Marshall. **Fife** Dr. and Mrs. R. MacGregor, J. Munday. **Grampian** Mrs. J.D. Davies, Mrs. E. Ferguson. **Highland** Ms. F. Newcombe. **Lothian** D. Loughney, F. Germi, J. Ellison, Ms. L. Macleod, W.F. Howarth, S. Wensley, P. Hyvonen. **Stewartry** G.H. Smith, Mr. and Mrs. R. Ackerley. **No Branch** J. Hastings, J. Mackenzie, S. Morris. **South of the Border** C. Hartley, B. Bourke.

200 Club

The latest prize winners are: **September** – 1st £30 Mrs. J. Watson; 2nd £20 Mrs. G. Hartland; 3rd £10 J. Ballantyne. **October** – 1st £30 Dr. J. Stewart; 2nd £20 Dr. Campbell; 3rd £10 Miss S. Goode. **November** – 1st £150 Miss McCulloch; 2nd £75 Prof. Jenkins; 3rd £50 R.J. Allen; 4th £30 Mrs. Pyall; 5th £20 P.W. Speak; 6th £10 Mrs. J. Jacobs. There are still some places to fill to complete 200 members. If you are a member of the SOC and over 18 you can join for the remainder of the 200 Club year for £6.00. Please send a cheque payable to "SOC 200 Club" to me at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire, TD6 9NH.

Daphne Pierce-Duncombe

Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group

The SOC is represented on this group, which includes the Scottish Raptor Study Groups, RSPB Scotland, BTO Scotland and SNH (see *SBN*65:5-6). The group meets quarterly, but there are also meetings of a separate science support sub-committee on which the SOC is also represented. Over the last year the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group (SRMG) has been involved in the preparation of a Raptor Monitoring Manual which will provide guidelines to raptor workers and will be published by the Stationery Office in 2004.The Science sub-committee has prepared frameworks for monitoring Golden Eagle, Peregrine, Hen Harrier, Merlin and Buzzard making use of existing data and planning how best to collect it in the future so that population trends and causes for changes can be better understood. There has been input into the Raptor Round-up which the SOC produces and circulates to all its members. The Group has employed a Raptor Monitoring Officer (Brian Etheridge) who has recently been collecting all data for 2003 from the Raptor Study Groups in order to set up a new monitoring database. The Group also has representation on the Moorland Forum and is active in any conservation issues affecting raptors in Scotland.

Mark Holling

Argyll Bird Club Spring Meeting

The Argyll Bird Club Spring Meeting will be held in the Royal Marine Hotel, Hunter`s Quay, Dunoon, on Saturday, 27th March, 2004 - to which non-members are always welcome. The event, which runs from about 10.30a.m - 4.30pm, usually includes a diverse programme of speakers, with topics likely to include birds in Argyll and further afield, plus matters of a wider natural history remit. Announcements of Recent Bird Sightings, read by The Argyll Bird Recorder, Paul Daw, are always of interest. We invariably start the day with coffee before the programme begins, which allows time to congregate and catch up with old friends. The breaks half way through both morning and afternoon sessions, and the lunch hour, all provide further opportunities to exchange news and views, plus making use of the hotel`s facilities and giving car-bound dogs a few minutes of relief! Any SOC member wishing to find out more about the Club should contact the Chairman - David Wood at Drovers House, Bellanoch, Lochgilphead, Argyll PA31 8SN (phone 01546 830272, e-mail: puffinus@stormie.idps.co.uk at home, or phone 01546 603611, e-mail: david.wood@snh.gov.uk at work) who will be happy to forward them a complimentary copy of the Club's quarterly magazine - *The Eider*.

Katie Pendreigh

Save the Albatross - Stop Pirate Fishing - Sign the Petition

Throughout the Southern Ocean seabirds face the danger of death by drowning on longline hooks. Unless changes are made within the fishing industry we will witness the extinction of some albatross species. We can influence this deadly outcome. Please sign this petition to help save the albatross.

This petition has been born from the John Ridgway Save the Albatross Voyage and the BirdLife International 'Save the Albatross' Campaign. It is supported by BirdLife International and partner groups in over 100 countries, Greenpeace and the British Antarctic Survey. John Ridgway and representatives of conservation organisations will present the petition to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation in June 2004.

A word from John Ridgway "*Almost forever, the albatross has graced the skies of the Southern Ocean. But soon they will be no more.*

Pirate longline fishing will kill them all. I cannot stand by and watch this happen. I will sail around the world, following their circumpolar track to raise public awareness and prevent their needless slaughter. It may be the last chance for the albatross.

I invite you to help. Add your name to the cry to stop the needless slaughter of the albatross. Please sign the petition.

Into the mist..." ***John Ridgway, Sept. 2003.***

To follow the John Ridgway Save the Albatross Voyage, go to; www.savethealbatross.org

To obtain the Petition for you and your friends to sign, go to; http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A552908

Fleece hat in navy with SOC logo
One size - £8.50 + £1.50 p&p

Blue biro with silver SOC logo
£1.00 + 50p p&p

Only six Chris Rose Prints left.
£30 + £3 p&p from HQ.

Balavil Sport Hotel. (Jimmy Maxwell)

CONFERENCE 2003

Once again, the Balavil Sport Hotel at Newtonmore was the venue for the SOC Conference and AGM. The 2003 event took place over the weekend of 31st October to 2nd November and its success reflected the extremely hard work of the organising committee and SOC staff. The report that follows in these pages is a combined effort of two of the new editors, Jimmy Maxwell and Brian Cartwright with able support from Ron Forrester, Tom Gray, Dave Merrie and Stuart Rivers.

Friday evening

Ian Andrews, SOC President, opened the Conference and welcomed all those attending. The theme of the event this year was "Picturing Birds" and it was much travelled photographer, Eric McCabe, who presented the first lecture with a winter journey to Japan to see cranes and eagles. In addition to these, he also saw jay, redstart and shrike plus great, marsh, coal and willow tits; all these were different sub-species from the birds we see in Scotland. No house sparrows but lots of tree sparrows. This talk was a delicious taster for the main Conference with the slender beauty of the cranes coming to life in vivid and stunning photographs. No-one present will forget the final picture of a sea eagle flying towards the cranes which was described by one person present as one of the finest bird photographs that he'd seen.

Unforgettable Japanese Cranes with Eric. (Eric McCabe)

Bill Gardner, SOC Development Officer, followed with an up-date on the new Club headquarters at Aberlady. It was typical Bill with detail presented effectively and with humour. Design of the HQ is complete and planning permission was granted on 2nd October; the process was straightforward but thanks were expressed to both BTO and RSPB for their support. In the presentation, potential problems of alternative locations around Aberlady were highlighted but it was comforting to learn that the chosen site has a list of 250 species. It is an exciting project but much work is still to be done especially in achieving the fundraising targets. Donations to the project by corporate organisations in terms of materials and support services showed the value of relationships with the commercial sector.

Ian Andrews returned for the final session which included a presentation on the likely layout of the coming publication, *Birds of Scotland*. One of the objectives of BS3 is to be able to illustrate all 495 species with the best photographs available in Scotland and so this year's Photographic Competition had taken place with this in mind. The results of this were then announced (details on p.4 of this issue). It was a fitting end to the first evening and there was no doubt that the theme of the Conference had got off to a good start. ***BC***

Many members went on an unsucessful search for a local Sea Eagle at Insh Marshes. (Hawk Conservancy/Jimmy Maxwell - manipulated by Lang Stewart)

Saturday

In the morning delegates were free to bird watch and the cold, crisp morning provided its own reward for the hardy souls. Those who preferred a more relaxing approach to the Conference were able to spend time (and money!) in the attractive retail area on the first floor prior to the afternoon's sessions.

Keith Brockie at the goods table with Jill Andrews. (Jimmy Maxwell)

John Busby opened the afternoon and treated us to "Instabird" on what looked like a giant-sized loo roll. True to his artistic temperament he had changed his mind about the subject matter of his talk almost at the last moment. Inspired by Eric's photographs of cranes the evening before, he used cranes as the medium for showing us how the artist perceives the various facets of birds, their shapes, colours, patterns and translates these into images. With the lightest of touches, he tested his concept on paper. Invisible to most of the audience, John Busby was hesitant at first, but, as his confidence grew, the image began to build on the paper. Cranes standing, cranes posturing

Four Japanese Cranes. (John Busby)

in display and obeisance, cranes flying. A sea eagle appeared, diving on the scattering, frightened cranes. "No", said Eric McCabe, "My cranes were oblivious to the eagle; the eagle went for a fox". A fox sprang up!

The work in progress now assumed the appearance of a frieze. Helpers rushed to wind it on to fresh paper. A perched peregrine came next. A tree sprouted below, changing the perspective. The peregrine was John's first love - as a boy he imitated one by rushing round the garden "scaring pigeons". A few more scratches on the paper accumulated into the recognisable shape of a fleeing pigeon; shading gave pictorial weight, quick lines suggested land below and clouds above.

After a shot at doing a frogmouth diving on prey, a bird he'd never seen, John returned to his favourite and originally intended subject of kittiwakes. Using a paper model, he showed how it helped him to construct images of birds in various flight postures. "Oh! but we should have the cliff first." So, one appeared, and a flight line of a kittiwake, wheeling away, twisting and turning, interacting with other kittiwakes. At the end came the lesson - 'Make your hand react to the things you see.' Well John had done so superbly. We had had a master class. ***DM***

Ian Wallace is renowned for his inspirational energy and enthusiasm, and this was again to the fore in the presentation that followed entitled *The Field Sketch – Fact or Fiction?*, where he set about providing a "defence of the field sketch before it is knocked into history by glossy photos". We were treated to a selection of drawings from his early days, with the initial tendency to affix the 'wings of geese' to all birds in flight, through the steep learning curve of experiences on Fair Isle and the new suite of species encountered on National Service in Kenya. Rarities like Britain's first Wilson's Phalarope and Citrine Wagtail progressed to his love of the redpoll complex and the

Ian Wallace after his talk. (Jimmy Maxwell)

ID challenges within, while the close examination of birds for sketching underpinned his interest in field identification - observation of different nostril shapes in warblers being one illustrated example. Other rarities seen allowed a few digs at record-assessing bodies which got support from some parts of the audience. The lack of field-sketching among the current generation of birdwatchers was lamented, but it was good to hear that Ian has lost nothing of his enthusiasm for drawing and birds. ***SR***

Michael Thomas's time machine rushed us from 2000BC or earlier to the present at an average speed of 100 years a minute. Early representations of birds were symbolic or decorative rather than scientifically accurate. In the first 2000 years we travelled from a Papua New Guinea stone pestle, flying over the 100 metre humming bird in the Nazca desert, past a frieze of swallows in Athens and ancient Egyptians catching wildfowl, down across the tremendously powerful symbols of birds of prey of the Greeks and Egyptians, to land upon a handsome cockerel in a Roman mosaic floor.

The millennium of the Dark Ages was skipped and we restarted our journey in 12th century Italy with a beautiful bronze gyrfalcon. Next followed St. Francis of

Musing on the displays. (Jimmy Maxwell)

Assisi and his birds; later Hieronymus Bosch and his erotic composition of birds and naked couples in the "Garden of Delights".

A squacco heron of c.1600 seems to be the first attempt to accurately portray a bird. At about the same time, the "Concourse of Birds" got some right and others wrong. From 1612, a Turkey from India made one wonder how this bird got so far, when it had hardly been imported to Europe from America. Portrayals became more realistic, like the 18th century 'Cock in a Shower' - you could feel the wet feathers. But, in the far north, symbolic images prevailed - from an ancient eskimo raven mask, to the modern lithograph of a "round bird".

Enter the 19th century masters, Landseer and Audubon, who mixed reality (more from skins than life) with imaginative poses. Perhaps Brune Lillefors, with his eiders of 1896, was the first artist who really knew his birds. So from now on there were at least two distinct streams - the artistic but realistic, as in a greetings card of tree sparrows from Japan, and the distorted or purely symbolic as with Paul Klee and Pablo Picasso. Michael even allowed some photographers as artists, but ended very topically with references to previous speakers John Busby and Ian Wallace. ***DM***

The 67th AGM

Ian Andrews, our retiring President, welcomed all those attending and presented the Council's Annual Report. He thanked all those who had supported him in his time in office, highlighting especially Mark Holling's able contributions as Vice President. He wished Mark every success as President and felt that he was leaving the SOC Council in good hands.

Janet Crummy, Treasurer, presented the Statement of Accounts giving a simple but lucid idea of the year's complicated financial procedures. A grateful audience was happy to agree the Accounts which were duly accepted. Janet, after all her hard work in this post now becomes our new Vice President, the position of Treasurer to be filled by new Council member Dick Vernon (Ayrshire). Appreciation was voiced for the valuable contribution from retiring Council member, Allister Lavery, during his five years of service. The extra position will be filled by Keith Morton (Edinburgh). We wish all of them every success in their work on Council.

Mark Holling, duly elected as our new President, concluded the AGM with a short address where he paid all due respect to Ian Andrews' vast contributions while in office and gave personal thanks to him for his support. Credit was given to Bill Gardner, Development Officer, and untiring protagonist in the Waterston House project, who, with his staff, is steering steadily through each development stage. Mark emphasized the continuing value of this work, especially in the next few years as the Club adjusts to this next exciting phase.

Under AOB a question was asked concerning the suggested charging of levies at Branch meetings. Various points were raised, including the matter of non-member attendees. It was announced that the decision on levies should be left to each Branch committee.

The President then formally concluded the meeting after wishing everyone all success in the coming Club year. ***JM***

Saturday evening

An enjoyable dinner was, once again, provided by the hotel and served with speed and efficiency. The buzz of conversation in the dining room was testament to the enjoyment that was being experienced and to the friendly atmosphere of the whole event. Laughter was the order of the evening as Ian Wallace entertained all those present with his usual tongue-in-cheek look at the bird scene today. A valuable prize of an SOC pen was awarded to the best bird theme tie worn by the male diners. Dancing ended the evening for some whilst others retired either to bed or "some other place"! ***BC***

Sunday

Tim Loseby used his lecture, entitled "A Bird Photographer's Garden", to show a sequence of splendid slides, taken over the last 15 years, with many of the photographs captured from the windows of his home. The garden itself was a fairly typical suburban space, with some woodland adjacent. The essential feature, however, to bring the birds within camera range, was a middle-sized pond in the centre of the lawn. In harder winters, the water often required to be kept open by breaking the ice daily.

A pebbled beach provided the main stage on which the local Kent birds could strut their stuff, moving and perching amongst logs, catkin twigs and flowers, etc. each appropriate to the season. Native flora, of lilies and other aquatics, kept the habitat looking natural and a total of 79 bird species had used the bathing and drinking facilities. Possibly the most outstanding picture for me was that of the Hawfinch, but Tim had photographed many of the commoner species to best effect.

Delegates taking a moment to chat between talks. (Jimmy Maxwell)

Paul Hackett followed with his presentation on "Digiscopes", a word which wasn't even in my vocabulary at the beginning of the day. However a digiscope is essentially a telescope with a digital camera (still or video) fitted at the eyepiece end. Inevitably there are problems of compatibility between cameras and 'scopes from different manufacturers, and there are significant costs in purchasing equipment for anyone starting from scratch.

It appeared to me however that the most important items are the adaptor, required to link camera and 'scope, a stable tripod and a cable release for the shutter. The latter reduces camera shake resulting from the high magnification of combined 'scope and camera. Using members of the audience, Paul demonstrated that no previous experience was needed to produce a photograph with the equipment, once it was in place - the whole activity can be reduced to one of "button pressing".

Paul Doherty and Frances Gatens talk videos. (Jimmy Maxwell)

Last year's Rufous Turtle Dove in Stromness. (Paul Hackett)

However, before I can start, I shall have to upgrade my own Kodak Digicam 240. I may be further tempted when Paul's promised book on the subject appears on the market, but even then, the professional standards of his photography will always stay beyond my reach. ***TG***

Following a short break for tea or coffee, Mark Hamblin, a former winner of the *British Birds* prestigious 'Bird Photographer of the Year' title, treated us to a selection of breathtaking photographs, all but one of which (an evocative shot of a pair of European bee-eaters) were taken in Britain. These included a bathing jay sporting a 'punk rocker' hairstyle, a ring ouzel carrying a recently caught lizard, a perfectly composed picture of a summer-plumaged slavonian grebe and a frame-filling male sparrowhawk. But for many, his photographs of owls (particularly a little owl feeding a moth to its young and a wonderfully composed picture of a barn owl perched on a gate), were perhaps the pinnacles in a mouth-watering selection.

Mark who grew up in Warwickshire has recently moved to the Scottish Highlands. As the quality of his photographs fully illustrate, this is England's loss and Scotland's gain. ***RF***

The last talk following our Conference theme, Picturing Birds, was by Paul Doherty. Could there possibly be anything more to say on the subject? With Paul's video expertise, we were to enter another dimension altogether - that of Movement and Sound. With Movement, the video images came thick and fast – that sooty shearwater gliding endlessly through the wave-tops – the diving eiders caught suspended inside huge transparent breakers and that immense roost of knot – we could home right in on those restless, undulating swathes of running waders..... And in contrast, something as private as a skulking jack-snipe, bobbing as it probed the mud for its prey or the tiny pallas's warbler, delicately searching among the twigs for insects.....

Sometimes the video would catch a sequence of events – the hapless sanderling caught first by the marauding bonxie only to be retaken by the herring gull and then finally dispatched by the all-powerful greater black-back – a lesser black-back tearing up its rabbit prey, with comical interruptions from a tail-tweaking carrion crow, all became realities for us as the video revealed them.

Sound too can bring reality – we watched as a wren and then a wood warbler delivered their sibilant melodies, lower mandibles vibrating on the trilling sequences. A blackcock leapt and strutted giving its frenzied wheezing calls and the beauty of blackbird and nightingale songs thrilled us in such personal close-ups on their performances. Paul demonstrated how an unwanted extraneous noise from a reversing lorry could be eliminated from a recording – certainly not like that in the old days!

Lastly the gulls – what better medium than video for freezing wings in flight to sort out those ageing and moulting problems, Paul was now opening our eyes to its educative potential. The scene moved to gulls in Japan, and somehow I felt, remembering Eric McCabe's Japanese cranes, that the Conference had come full circle. This splendid contribution from Paul Doherty formed a fitting conclusion to a weekend full of visual stimulation of all kinds, certainaly an experience to remember. ***JM***

Little Ringed Plovers in Scotland

Male Little Ringed Plover. (Hugh Addlesee)

1. A breeding attempt in Clyde

For me, the Little Ringed Plover has always had that bit of magic about it. Ever since reading Kenneth Allsop's book about the first English breeding, the bird has remained in the special category. Such a wonderful description of the bird's migratory flight over the English Channel among waves of other species and its eventual arrival at a small gravel-pit – great stuff!

Well, something the same happened this year right on my local patch, Baron's Haugh RSPB Reserve, Motherwell. In fact, it all started in April, 2002, when Dave Abraham an avid young local birder, through regular, painstaking watching, found the species at Carbarns Pool, a flooded field just beyond the Reserve.

Although a new bird for him, the diminutive size beside other migrant Ringed Plovers, the bright yellow orbital ring and the lack of wing-bar when it flew, all persuaded him to access Birdline - Scotland directly, with the news. This brave move, of course, prompted the usual sceptical remarks, especially as the bird kept regularly disappearing, but Dave piled on the agony by reporting two and then three of the species present and also mating taking place.

The usual questions were asked – could the birds be contemplating nesting? – were they frequenting the small gravel spits of the nearby River Clyde? – and why were there longish periods with no birds present?

I became involved in fairly long sessions of watching. Every time the bird flew up, we followed the circling sweeps as it gained height and settled on its eventual direction over the extensive backdrop of fields, farm-buildings and the cluttered mass of industrial Lanarkshire. Was it possible that this species should be forsaking such an apparently suitable area with plenty of feeding and minimal disturbance, except for cows, to find a better habitat in that kind of landscape?

We scrutinised the O.S. map, trying to project the last sighting into some of the numerous wastelands of the Motherwell area – sites of previous coalmining and heavy industry where rosebay-willow herb now ruled over a desert of concrete and industrial rubbish. We found wheatears, meadow pipits, larks, linnets, goldfinches, redpolls, oystercatchers and then – plovers – but only Ringed Plovers, nesting quietly behind a factory among stony rubble. The 2002 season eventually ended with fewer and fewer sightings of the Little Ringed Plovers and no answer to the breeding question.

This year, we were better organised. As soon as the species showed up in April at Baron's Haugh, we swung into action with entire days spent tramping out long parallel transects over industrial relict ground, progressing further and further away from the birds' regular recreational area. Fourteen breeding pairs of Ringed Plover were found in the process as well as some lapwing nesting sites and, delightfully, an abundance of Brown Hares which cavorted about in the open as we had our lunch breaks.

Eventually, after almost giving up hope, our efforts paid off. In one of our last areas to survey, we heard the different piping call, clinched the bird's identity and quickly retired to telescope-viewing cover. The female was soon running in to brood her three eggs – which were noticeably smaller than Ringed, the only material, a lining of specially selected, fine stone-grains. The immediate area was plain, grey, clinker-gravel with only the occasional birch seedling enriching the surface. Several other Ringed Plovers nested nearby.

A 'record' photo by digiscope was taken from cover (of poor quality due to the distance and heat distortion) and later, when the bird had left, a discrete tele-photo of the eggs, always conscious of the scent risk, the constant worry of all nest-finders.

The last problem now remained. Was this 'our' bird, so far away from Baron's Haugh? On our next visit, mobile phones were used with Dave at Carbarns Pool and myself in view of the nest. Sure enough, eighteen minutes after Dave texted me that the female had just flown off, she flighted down and came running in to relieve her mate on the nest. He, in his turn, took off into a headwind and arrived at Baron's Haugh twenty minutes later. – a well-organised commuting couple! (it was the 14th May)

Unfortunately, when I returned eleven days later, it was to find a wrecked, burnt-out car within only 40 metres of the nest, which was empty. With an incubation period of 25 days, the eggs could never have been hatched in that time and tyre-mark swathes within a metre of the nest indicated the kind of disturbance trauma the birds must have endured. However it is possible that this site was also used in 2002 and perhaps will be again in 2004. We will be waiting...

Another single male Little Ringed Plover was found towards the end of May, on a similar site 6km away from this one, where it remained for about three days. The species is obviously showing signs of interest in the Lanarkshire area, and, as we shall see in the next note, it seems to be part of quite a general influx into Scotland.

Little Ringed Plover nest. (Lang Stewart)

Area	Year	Location/Habitat	Breeding Information/Comments
Angus & Dundee	01	Inland, private site with sand & gravel / pools	Probable breeding
	02	"	1st pair fledged 3
		"	2nd pair fledged 3
		"	3rd pair fledged 1
	03	Same site as above	1st pair incubating – deserted due to works lorry disturbance
		"	2nd pair mating/nesting – deserted (same reason)
		"	3rd pair displaying - no breeding (same reason)
Argyll			*No records of breeding*
Ayrshire			*No records of breeding*
Borders			*No records of breeding*
Caithness			*No records of breeding*
Clyde	02	Carbarns Pool (B. Haugh) Flooded field area	Pair displaying/mating but breeding unconfirmed One other bird present
	03	Ex-industrial site – pools and mixed clinker-gravel	Pair incubating, but failed due to disturbance – each bird commuted regularly to Baron's Haugh RSPB Res.
		Housing development in Steppes area	Pair displaying often but no confirmed breeding established
		Gartloch	Possibly the same pair seen here as above
Clyde Islands			*No records of breeding*
Dumfries & Galloway	02	Active quarry with sand and gravel	Pair incubating – one chick seen. Also another bird present
		Abandoned quarry	Alarm calls from pair, but no nest found or young seen in area
	03	"	Pair displaying – (Ringed plover harassment)
	(97)	Dry building site near Lockerbie	One chick ringed – (this record is previously unreported and inserted just for interest)
Fife	02	West side	Attempted breeding
	03	Central - Areas of gravel in quarries	Pair bred successfully
		"	Pair bred successfully
		West side	Probable breeding
Forth			*No records of breeding*
Highland			*No records of breeding*
Lothian	03	Restored opencast site with industrial spoil and seasonal water at some distance	Two pairs on this site – Fledged 1
		Inland reservoir with stony mud exposed	Pair incubating, but attempt failed – disturbance from anglers
Moray & Nairn	01	Large shingle areas of the Spey Estuary	Pair present – probable breeding
	02	"	Juveniles seen in the area
	03	"	Nest found – young hatched
		"	Another pair seen – possibly breeding
N-E Scotland	02	(A new site) – disused corner of a gravel pit next to a pool	Fledged 1
	03	Same site	3 half-grown chicks seen
	03	Loch of Strathbeg (breeding site unknown)	5 birds seen (Adults and Juvs.) in late July
Orkney			*No records of breeding*
Outer Islands			*No records of breeding*
Shetland			*No records of breeding*

2. Scottish breeding records for years 2001–3

We can all check back easily to find out about Little Ringed Plovers' appearances and breeding in Scotland by consulting Rae Murray's excellent account in *Scottish Bird Report* (1996) and thereafter in each edition until 2000.

This brief note attempts merely to outline recent breeding attempts from then till the present. It does not include casual sightings of single birds and is deliberately vague as to site locations detail, for obvious reasons. I have tried to contact all informed parties in each area, but may inevitably have missed some records, so apologies if this has happened – later, more detailed accounts will hopefully put these right.

I thought it would be easiest to view or check each area if a table format was adopted, as above.

As you can see, Little Ringed Plovers seem to be favouring the Central Lowlands and Eastern coastal areas for their colonising attempts; also, a whole variety of man-made habitats are being chosen. It may well be that many of these undesirable wasteland sites are just not being covered consistently enough to catch this unobtrusive little wader in its expansion moves. It will be interesting to see next year whether the species consolidates today's areas and what new territories it colonises elsewhere. Whatever its future successes, "Charadrius dubious" is surely beginning to deserve a slightly more hopeful title!

Jimmy Maxwell

View from the Clyde, looking over Carbarns Pool, (in Autumn) up towards Motherwell. (Jimmy Maxwell)

BIRD ARTISTS IN SCOTLAND

The trouble with Darren Rees is that he has done so much in his artistic career it is difficult to provide the reader with an adequate portrait within two pages – and I thought the editor had handed me an easy assignment! Well here goes...

September of this year sets the scene. The Society of Wildlife Artists (SWLA) had its 40th Anniversary Exhibition in the Mall Galleries in London with over 400 paintings on show by the elite of British Wildlife Art and I had gone to the preview. *Countryman* magazine had sponsored a new annual award for the best portrayal of British countryside in a painting. And there was its first recipient- 'Red Kites over Stirling Carse' by Darren Rees! Not unexpected, perhaps, since Darren's work has been attracting a string of awards since 1981 including the RSPB Fine Art Award, *Birdwatching* Magazine Young European Artist of the Year, and *Birdwatch* Magazine Artist of the Year.

Born in Andover, Hampshire in 1961, Darren graduated in Mathematics at Southampton University and taught the subject for a year before pursuing a career in wildlife art. His first major commission was *Biographies for Birdwatchers* by Barbara and Richard Mearns (Academic Press 1988) and it remains one of my favourite books, not least for its superb black and white illustrations. (The Finsch's Wheatear and Raddes's Accentor in particular are fine examples of Darren's skills as an illustrator). The evocative watercolours in *Portrait of Wildlife in a Hill Farm* (Whittet Books1995) are a delight too (not just birds here but flowers, bats, butterflies and others). His work reveals a wide range of artistic ability – from the precise requirements of ornithological illustration as in *Corvid* plates in *Birds of the Western Palaearctic* to the freer expression of his own book *Bird Impressions* (Swan Hill Press 1993) which received much critical acclaim. This latter book includes the watercolour *Chough and Bluebells*, which caused Nicolas Hammond (*Modern Wildlife Painting*- PICA Press 1998) to comment "the unusual combination of a chough and bluebells derives from Ree's experience in the field. Unless he had seen the bird among bluebells no artist would have considered it."

Therein lies the secret! Darren has spent a lifetime from childhood, observing and sketching birds and other wildlife in the natural habitat. He is an enthusiast for the natural world. When a painting is conceived and derived from the artist's lifetime knowledge and experience of his subject, it shows. The feel and the 'jizz' of the subject are just right! This is the message Darren's paintings convey.

Brown Hare and Curlew chicks (watercolour).

Red-throated Diver and Phalaropes, Fetlar, Shetland (watercolour).

Darren lives in the Carse of Stirling near Thornhill and about four miles from my own home. His studio looks over the Carse and the West Perthshire hills. It is a perfect setting for a wildlife artist with its red kites, flocks of migrating geese, curlews, brown hares and the like. I reckon his 'Hare and curlew chicks' (shown here) were just along the track from his front door! Amidst all the paraphernalia which artists gather in their studios the critical items are the sketchbooks - and Darren has shelves of them stretching back for some years. As I drive along the bumpy track to visit him, there is always the feeling of anticipation at seeing his latest work-in-progress.

Hawk Owl, White Mountains, New Hampshire.

Wallcreepers in the Pyrenees, New World Warblers in New England, Cormorants on Craigleith Island – they are all there. His Hawk Owl started out as field pencil sketches. Then there came the watercolour composition layouts and finally the large acrylic painting, sometime later snowflakes were added. I know the White Mountains and Mt. Washington well - Darren's painting really captures the scene.

Recently he has returned from the latest Artists for Nature Foundation/WWF Project in Peru where he spent three weeks with Chris Rose, Darren Woodhead and others. I've had the joy of thumbing through

Darren's sketchbooks from the trip – the hummingbird watercolours dazzle on the pages. The Peru Project will be the theme for the 2004 Bird Fair at Rutland Water. I cannot wait for the book to come out.

Over the past decade Darren's artistic activities have moved on. Whereas previously his output was mainly fine illustrations in various books and beautifully rendered watercolours, now he seeks the freedom of expression that his larger exhibition paintings in acrylic or oils provide. In recent times large paintings have been inspired by watching "a bewildering exodus of ten million bats billowing into a Texas sky" and the sighting of "White-beaked Dolphins feeding with a mighty Blue Whale off Iceland in 2002". As you chat to Darren about his work you can sense his passion, and even restlessness, to capture and portray on canvas or board the amazing variety of wildlife and birds he has observed and the special unique moments embedded in his memory. In short, whilst very much still a superb illustrator, he has developed as an artist, now seeking to resist overworked detail but to render in an impressionistic and painterly fashion the great spectacle of nature. There is probably more of the man himself revealed in his current work; he has been observing birds and wildlife since a child but clearly still revels in nature.

Waxwing quartet (acrylic).

No artist works in a vacuum and Darren will count John Singer Sargent and Andrew Wyeth in U.S.A. and Lars Jonsson and Charles Tunnicliffe and others as influencing his work at various stages of his development as an artist. He and his wife lived in New England for two years which explains the American influence. His works have been accepted on a number of occasions at the prestigious 'Birds in Art' annual exhibition at the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Museum in Winsconsin (This exhibition only selects 100 paintings each year from around 1500 submitted by bird artists worldwide!). He is a regular exhibitor at the SWLA annual exhibition and is currently on the SWLA Council. In 2004 apart from the latter show, he will be exhibiting at:

'Diversity of Wildlife in Art II' at Edinburgh Zoo Gallery (14th May–17th June)

Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Slimbridge (One man show 14th Nov.–5th Jan. 2005)

During December 2004 a small selection of his works can be viewed at Stirling Art, in Upper Craigs St., Stirling.

Some of Darren's current work is illustrated here. The 'Waxwings' and 'Hawk Owl' are now available in fine giclee prints (he is offering these at a special price to SOC members with the Club receiving 20% of sale proceeds).

Whilst I write this article Darren has left the Galapagos Islands and is somewhere in the Amazon leading a birding group. Since 1993 he has been a tour leader with Speyside Wildlife Tours and his travels encompass not only the Galapagos, but Iceland, Texas, Arizona, New England, Majorca, Pyrenees, Extremadura, Sweden, Poland, Holland, Cyprus, and Nova Scotia (Wonder if he keeps a bird list total?). The Autumn 2003 *Birds Illustrated* magazine carries an article on the work of Lars Jonsson – the author is Darren Rees, now a regular contributor on the subject of Wildlife Art. Oh, and his 'Waxwings' are appearing in the Winter 2003 issue. A busy man indeed.

In rounding off this portrait of the artist there has to be kept in mind the strong support provided to him by his wife Gwynneth and children Michael (7yrs) and Sophie (4yrs). I haven't seen examples of Michael's artistic talent yet, but on my last visit Sophie was standing at her easel in the kitchen painting Castle Campbell with great panache, under the watchful advisory gaze of Darren. The start of a Rees' artistic dynasty?

Richard Daly

Abernethy Forest (watercolour).

Highland Branch in Orkney - 9th to 12th May 2003

On the cliffs near Marwick Head. (Carol James)

The party of 14 met in Inverness on a bright sunny morning. The forecast for the weekend was pretty awful and no ferries sailed to Orkney the day before. May should be good in the islands but, of course, we had summer in March and April this year! Nothing to do but, hopefully, set off north, straight up the coast. The ferry wasn't until 6.45pm - time to make a few detours, first to Loch Fleet and the old ferry pier opposite Little Ferry. By the time we reached there our bird list had started - kite, buzzard, oystercatcher, swallow, song thrush, shelduck and most of the common birds.

At Loch Fleet, we watched ringed plovers running along the sand and a common sandpiper bobbed among the stones. Eider ducks (several males and one female) floated on the incoming tide and a heron flew gently past. Pied wagtails flitted along the shore as several shelduck fed in the muddy pools. We continued around the loch to the Mound where we stopped to stretch our legs. A pair of buzzards cavorted above the cliff - then a peregrine, low over the top, up and round the bluff..... An osprey floated over the hill and down to the loch, landing somewhere in the scrub at the far side. Although it occupied a nest in the area, we didn't have time to look for it. Wigeon and mallard pottered around the shallows and a great tit sang in the whins and scrub willows beside the car park.

On north, through Brora, Helmsdale and Dunbeath with swift, blue tit, cormorant, lapwing and house martin added to a growing list. At Leatheronwheel, seven of us followed the wooded glen to the harbour where the rest of the party would be having lunch. This lovely walk produced greenfinch, wren, willow warbler, robin and blackbird - and what a super harbour! The others had seen grey wagtail and a shag perched on the rocks guarding the entrance to the cove. Rock pipits and pied wagtails flitted here and there and the sun still shone! On again towards Thurso with another detour, this time to visit the upper reaches of the River Thurso, past Strathmore Lodge. An Osprey

Short-eared Owl. (Arthur Grosset)

was sitting on a post right in front of the bus - it took off and immediately started diving for fish – but without success. The weather had turned a bit cold with hailstones drumming on the roof, so no volunteers for more walking! We watched four common scoter diving in the loch - a snipe flew over and a golden plover was heard behind us.

Another loch held a distant black throated diver – no problem for the telescopes! Then it was time to head for the ferry, through Thurso and along the coast towards John o' Groats to Gills Bay. Common seals in the bay and on the rocks below us - a common gull, and shelduck, their plumage looking wonderful in the evening sunlight. The crossing was about an hour and a half – and very calm. I nipped out at one point to catch a puffin, lots of tysties and guillemots too. We arrived about 7.30pm at St Mary's Hope on South Ronaldsay.

We headed across the island, stopping at Echnaloch for the tufted duck, goldeneye, mergansers, long tailed ducks and mute swans on the loch. Swallows swooped low over the water feeding on the many insects hatching on such a nice balmy evening. Rooks, starlings and oystercatcher were added as we crossed the Churchill barriers to Burray - superb views of a great northern diver – then to the Mainland of Orkney, heading for Kirkwall.

Next morning we set off to explore the mainland - down to Scapa bay , a lovely harbour with three tugs at the pier. A raft of eider rode the swell, while ringed plover fed frantically along the shore. Black-headed gulls, fulmars, herring gulls and a couple of twite flying across and up the whin-covered bank. Arctic terns were diving on the other side of the pier and someone picked out a sandwich tern way out to sea. Next, east towards the airport, scattering the lapwings over the boggy grazing land - wheatears, rock doves and hoodies everywhere. We continued on to St Peter's Pool, a good wader spot in the winter, enjoying views of bar-tailed godwits and redshank. Some of us climbed over the dunes and looked south into a good strong wind to see yet more divers. It was a lovely spot. Then back to Echnaloch watching the long-tails flying in to feed on the loch with teal and lesser black-backs. The high wind ensured that the sandwiches lived up to their name!

After lunch it was back to the mainland. As we were driving along the south road towards Hobbister reserve, a female hen harrier rose nearby and flapped lazily along with us for a while before disappearing over the cliff – we hoped to see more of these wonderful birds but alas that was it for the week-end! We stopped at Maes Howe and some of us who had never been before, visited this amazing underground tomb, with its hieroglyphics, huge stones and interesting history. We drove on along the shore of Harray Loch and saw a black swan among lots of mute swans. A reed bunting perched on a fence post beside us, looking wonderful in the golden sunlight - a couple of bonxies were attacking the terns on a low island.

Next, we walked along the sea cliffs at Yesnaby point with distant views of the Old Man of Hoy. Primula scotica were found, wonderful to see again with its purple flowers and small yellow centres - also some lovely spring squill – tiny little sky blue flowers. You forget how small these primroses are after seeing the usual ones around the glens. Back in the bus again and on into Stromness, in time to head back to our B&B. A short-eared owl sat on a post overlooking a road junction. We drove past it slowly..... then back again. When we finally stopped the bus beside it, it glided off with its lovely slow and silent wing beat. After such a busy day it was good to relax with friends and a wee dram of the local whisky.

The next day was once again bright and sunny and our walk very pleasant, with views looking over to Hoy - the highest island in the Orkney archipelago. The flowers were lovely with forests of willow only 3 or 4 inches tall! Linnets flitted over the dry stone dykes and dunnocks popped in and out the ruins. On the mainland the sun shone - the sea a wonderful clear turquoise colour – the sand white, with skylarks calling above our heads. What more could you ask for? Then off again to the north coast, over the moors and hills. Four arctic skuas wheeled above the tops, chasing, diving, almost playing in the wind. We had our lunch at the aoleonite site near the Broch of Gurness, looking over to Rousay. Aeleonite is sand and shell wind-blown into rock and is only about 10,000 years old.

Two Tysties. (Arthur Grosset)

Arctic Skua chasing tern by John Busby

No rest for the wicked – off again, this time up a steep narrow track to a lochan with an RSPB hide to see the red throated divers nesting there. Wonderful – there were two pairs, giving everyone good views. At Brough Head half of us opted to walk along the tops of the magnificent sea cliffs to Marwick Head. The sun was shining, the sky blue with a few white fluffy clouds and a pleasant breeze blew in from the sea. Raft upon raft of guillemots and razorbills out to sea - bonxies and arctic skuas patrolling the cliffs. Noisy kittewakes and gliding fulmars added to the atmosphere of the place and a puffin flew in with its whirring flight to land near us. It was wonderful just sitting there taking it all in.

Too soon it was back into the bus and off to the Loons, an RSPB reserve, with a hide overlooking a shallow series of lochans and a large reedbed. Two families of mallard explored the channels of the reed beds and a superb male shoveler was feeding at the far side. Greylag geese and wigeon were away over in the distance. A coot slowly followed the break in the reeds and a heron stood quietly feeding at the edge. As we made our weary way back to Kirkwall a sparrow hawk swept past and another short-eared owl was spotted.

The next day was rather damp and drizzly. We were glad the weather had held for our two hectic days of birdwatching and sightseeing and that the rain only came as we were leaving. We had another calm crossing, although with poor visibility at first. The weather cleared as we approached the mainland and most of us went up on deck – then back to Inverness. We really packed a lot in for such a short time, seeing about 67 species in Orkney and 90 on the mainland as well as visiting most of the main historic sights. Thanks to all who came - it's the people as well as the birds that make a trip successful.

Janet Crummy

PRESIDENTIAL PROFILE

(Jimmy Maxwell)

The new President of the SOC, as from the AGM on 1st Nov 2003, is Mark Holling, so some of you may now be thinking it's time to know more about him. Due to his interest in the Club and his organising skills he has risen through various roles fairly quickly since his arrival in Scotland to take the helm.

Mark's interest in birds started at seven years of age and by high school days he was counting waders, gulls and doing beached bird surveys. By his sixth school year Scarborough Borough Council asked him to report on why Herring Gulls had become such an urban problem and he homed straight to the fact of nearby open refuse tipping which was later duly rectified. At Nottingham University he qualified in both biology and information technology, and although his interests lay much more in the former, he chose the latter as the vehicle for his career. Whilst at university, Mark presided over the Ornithological Society, after which he was active in the Leicestershire & Rutland Ornithological Society and still maintains his membership and contacts there today. A post with the Bank of Scotland brought Mark to Scotland in 1988.

Residing initially in Edinburgh, Mark soon took up residence in Borders Region for some years, though recently he moved to Lothian to live east of Edinburgh. All this period allowed him to be active in both Borders and Lothian SOC Branches and he must have clocked up considerable mileage going to the meetings of both. Though Mark will "twitch" a good bird in SE Scotland, his main interests lie firmly in bird distribution and record keeping and he got heavily into this by assisting in the production of Borders Bird Reports, contributing many of his personal records to these and to the Lothian Bird Reports.

Other interests soon progressed and Mark played a leading role in the production of that important book "The Breeding Birds of South-east Scotland, a Tetrad Atlas 1988-94", from the initial planning before the first fieldwork in 1988 right to its publication in 1998. As well as fieldwork and technical planning, Mark was very good at organising dates of meetings, who would do what and by when, and generally keeping everything on track. Another activity which Mark took over from Allan Brown in 1991 and still performs, is to lead the South-east Scotland Discussion Group monthly meetings from autumn to spring each year - an important role in which many issues, surveys and Club activities are discussed and planned; Mark takes on much of the letter writing, responses and agenda-preparing himself. Buzzards are yet another of his interests and he continues to compile records of this species' spread and distribution in Lothian and Borders. He is in the SE Scotland Raptor Study Group and is the SOC Representative on the Scottish Raptors Monitoring Group. A family man, one wonders how he can keep all these activities going?

Mark joined the SOC Council in 2000, and was Vice President under Ian during 2001-03, the two making a good working partnership. So what of the next two years? Mark would like to continue and build upon some initiatives begun in Ian's Presidency to make the central Club more inclusive of all its membership and branches, and to make the SOC the obvious choice of club to join for birders in Scotland. This means development of the recently begun Club and Branch websites and publications, and maintaining good communication between the Council, staff and members and where non-SOC bird clubs exist, to foster a relationship with these. Similarly, to maintain a position with other conservation and wildlife organisations and have a voice on these issues, something which Mark's work with the Discussion Group and Raptor bodies steers him towards. The recent reduction in size of the Council and creation of several committees, including the Regional Committee, has begun to extend the work of running the Club to more members and Branches.

Another goal for Mark's presidential time is to improve bird recording in Scotland through development by the Club of a common and improved standard for all recording areas. And lastly, his will be the task of overseeing the Club's move into Waterston House, where secure and ongoing partnership with Bill Gardner and his staff is vital – a task where success must involve all our membership.

Harry Dott

Mark Holling representing the SOC at the launch of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme June 2002.

Bird Atlases Update

In *SBN* 64 a summary of the current status of the Scottish bird atlases was presented. This brief article serves to bring members up to date. The last issue gave details of the new north-east Scotland atlas. It is also hoped that the teams responsible for those projects still conducting fieldwork will be able to provide interim results in future *SBN*s.

Clyde and Ayrshire
Fieldwork for these two atlases was completed a few years ago and compilation of the results ready for publication is still proceeding, but no end dates are yet available.

Clackmannanshire
The second year of fieldwork on the Clacks Bird Atlas is now over and completed forms are being returned. A further 48 km squares were allocated to 22 fieldworkers this spring to add to the 59 in 2002. This brings the total so far allocated to 107 out of 200 and means that the fieldwork is well on target for completion in the projected five years.

Some early findings relating to UK Biodiversity Action Plan species indicate that, of those likely to be found in Clacks, there have so far been no Black Grouse records and extremely few of Grey Partridge. Skylarks have been plentiful both on the Ochils and in suitable locations in lowland areas. There have also been good numbers of Song Thrush whilst only one Spotted Flycatcher has so far been recorded. In contrast, Tree Sparrows have been more widespread than anticipated, whereas Bullfinches have been quite sparse. Linnet numbers are in line with expectations and Reed Buntings have occurred in good numbers, especially along river systems.

Song Thrush by John Busby

A mapping programme is in the process of being set up and distribution maps of all species should be available by next spring. Extra volunteers are always welcome, please contact Neil Bielby (01786 823830; Neil.bielby@ntlworld.com). *[Contributed by Neil Bielby].*

North-east Scotland
The second year of fieldwork has been completed and the project is on track to survey all tetrads comprehensively by the end of the five year period – a huge task considering there are around 2,300 tetrads! Participation in the survey has been surprisingly reassuring, with similar numbers of fieldworkers in 2003 as in 2002 but including some new volunteers. Inclusion of two years of data means that the interim maps, which will be produced over the winter, are likely to give more meaningful results. Further information and contact details are given by Ian Francis in *SBN* 68: 8-9.

The Fife Bird Atlas
The news you've all been waiting for: the Fife Bird Atlas is now with the printers. Barring problems (of which there have been very many during the Atlas's gestation period!), the book should be with us before Christmas. Get your orders in quickly, as we have been able to decide on a very competitive pre-publication offer.

You will all agree that £20 for an A4 364-page Atlas, describing and mapping all species recorded throughout each year of the fieldwork (1991-1999), is a very reasonable price. If you live in Fife, an extra £1 will see your copy delivered to your door or, by arrangement, to SOC or FBC meetings for you to collect. If you live outwith Fife, postage and packing is a necessary extra, although you may collect a copy from RSPB Vane Farm for the nominal £1 surcharge or, if you can wait until after mid-January, from SOC HQ.

Finally, you can arrange to collect your copy from Fife Ornithological Atlas Group members at no charge. But first of all, you have to complete your order form and send your cheque! A copy of the order form will be found on the SOC website or, alternatively, contact: Norman Elkins, Secretary, Fife Ornithological Atlas Group, 18 Scotstarvit View, Cupar, Fife KY15 5DX. Tel: 01334 654348 or e-mail: jandnelkins@rapidial.co.uk

Lothian and Borders
Copies of *The Breeding Birds of South-east Scotland, a Tetrad Atlas 1988-1994* (published in 1998) are available for £15 per copy. This book had excellent reviews and should never be thought of as out of date. It remains the only detailed account of the distribution of all breeding species in Lothian and Borders and will remain a benchmark with which future surveys and information will be compared. The general layout is a double-page spread for all but the rarer species, with text on one page and a main map with subsidiary maps and block graphs on the other. With bird atlases for other parts of Scotland now being prepared, atlas aficionados should bear in mind that by the time this note is published there will probably be less than 100 copies of the South-east Scotland atlas available! It is intended to use the profits from the book to assist the costs of a bird-watching hide in the Lothian or Borders area. Possible sites are being investigated at present. To obtain a copy of the atlas, or for any other enquiries, please telephone Mark Holling (01620 894037), Harry Dott (0131 447 6525 after 8th Oct) or Jim Mattocks (0131 332 7104). A choice of collection points or ways of delivery to suit may be available. *[Contributed by Harry Dott].*

Mark Holling

REVIEWS

Birds and Light: The Art of Lars Jonsson by Lars Jonsson, Staffan Söderblom and Björn Linnell. 232 pp, 180 colour paintings. Christopher Helm, London. Hbk. ISBN 0-7136-6405-3. £35.00.

Most birders will be familiar with Lars Jonsson's distinctive work through his fieldguides, in particular *Birds of Europe* (Christopher Helm, 1996), but some may not be aware that he is also recognised in the art world as one of the best contemporary wildlife painters. This sumptuous book, weighing 2kg and with a large format of 28 x 30cm, is the first in English to regale us with biographical details of the life and work of this Swedish artist. Filled with memorable images (mainly of birds), it includes early childhood drawings, fieldguide illustrations, and beautiful sketchbook pages, watercolour paintings, oils and lithographs.

The first chapter, "Looking At Nature" by poet Staffan Söderblom, tries to psychoanalyse Jonsson and his work. I have to admit that I found this and the foreword by Hans Brummer, hard going as "We encounter a world where the existential questions temporarily step aside before the miracle of perception". However, don't be put off, as the text becomes much more readable and infinitely more interesting when Björn Linnell takes over the writer's task and, in the form of an interview beginning with "The Boy With The Magic Pen", provides an insight into what makes Jonsson tick. This works well, and we discover something about his upbringing, his burgeoning interest in birds and art and how this developed into a career in illustration and wildlife painting. They also discuss which artists influenced him and his thoughts on conservation and wildlife painting. A potted biography is provided in the final chapter.

An idea of the scale of some of Jonsson's work is provided by a photograph of him with one of his canvasses - the painting (of Grey Plovers) is almost 2m wide! We are given tantalising glimpses of how he works - sketching and painting in the field, using a telescope to get him closer to his subjects, and rattling off film in his excitement when he first encounters Sea Otters in California. The resultant painting of the otter has to be one of my favourites (p. 115) but I could list many more: Rooks pulling on worms (p. 169), juvenile Herring Gull (p. 147), and the pencil sketches of Garden Warbler (p. 91) are also superb.

This is a beautiful book which looks and feels exquisite. I recommend it to anyone interested in this artist's work. It makes an interesting read and its pages are, indeed, filled with "Birds and Light".

Liz Fraser

Tracks & Signs of the Birds of Britain & Europe (Second edition) by Roy Brown, John Ferguson, Michael Lawrence and David Lees. 2003. Christopher Helm. 333 pp. Pbk. ISBN 0-7136-5382-5. £24.99.

This is one in the Helm identification guide series; the first edition was published in 1987. There is a lengthy introductory section with chapters on interpretation of trails, nests and roosts, pellets and droppings and feeding and other signs. There is then an identification chapter (with text and facing illustrations) on feathers, which takes up nearly half of the book. These are ordered by size. Finally there is a chapter, again with illustrations, but on text pages, on skulls. This is ordered by type of bill.

The book contains a lot of information, particularly about feathers and moult. It is a little large for putting in a pocket, but should help considerably with identification of any feathers or bird skulls taken back home.

John Davies

Wild Flowers of Britain and Ireland Marjorie Blamey, Richard Fitter, and Alistair Fitter. A&C Black (Domino Guides). 482pp, numerous illustrations. Pbk. ISBN 0-7136-5944-0. £16.99

It is nearly 30 years since 'Fitter, Fitter & Blamey' came out. It rapidly established itself as an essential item of every library, usually living with the favoured bird guide in the car. This work is not precisely a replacement as its coverage is more restricted geographically, not dealing with the whole of NW Europe. On the other hand, it also deals with grasses, sedges and rushes, and ferns, horsetails, etc. The illustrations by Marjorie Blamey are new, and there are distribution maps by Alastair Fitter, with Richard Fitter providing the descriptive text, which is also new.

The book has been substantially updated – although plants do not move about in the same way as birds, they undoubtedly change their distribution. For example, the earlier book did not mention Few-flowered Garlic *Allium paradoxum*, even though it was already prevalent along the Water of Leith. Now we are struggling to keep it out of our garden, and this book duly includes it, indicating that it is increasing rapidly, but rarely dominant. Thus, for each species, we are told about the plant's status as well as where it is to be found.

There are one or two minor criticisms. The distribution maps are small (inevitably in a book of this size) and printed in green. There is special indication if the plant is to be found in Orkney, Shetland or the Scillies, but it can be impossible to discern *eg* whether Sea Holly *Eryngium maritimum* is to be found in Scotland, as it is (or was up to two years ago) on Iona. Then they run down the side of the text page but do not always align precisely with the matching text, so you have to be careful when referring to them. Also it can be difficult to find a plant by an alternative name, even if given in the index; synonyms are not highlighted in the text.

However, these are minor quibbles. This new guide is very likely rapidly to become as indispensable as its predecessor. You will almost certainly want to have it, even though there is not a single picture of a bird in it!

John Davies

Where to watch birds – Britain by Simon Harrap and Nigel Redman. 2003 Christopher Helm, London. ISBN 0-7136-4137-1 pbk. £19.99

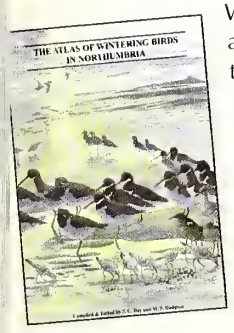
To write a guide such as this covering, as it does, the whole country is a fairly monumental task involving a huge amount of local research and contacts. The result is a substantial and impressive tome of over 600 pages which updates a previous guide published in 1987 and now covers nearly 440 sites with over 240 clearly defined maps.

Users of the guide may inevitably find their local patch not mentioned but, obviously, the authors had to be reasonably selective. In this respect, bearing in mind how species can fluctuate and sites change for better or worse, the areas covered provide a good insight into what may be expected throughout the year. Two omissions that might have been mentioned were the three hides at Musselburgh and Wigtown Bay which is one of the largest National Nature Reserves and has an excellent hide.

Though possibly a bit high in price for a paperback, today's mobile bird watcher will find this guide invaluable when planning a tour or following up an elusive rarity.

Keith Macgregor

Atlas of Wintering Birds in Northumbria compiled & edited by J C Day & M S Hodgson 2003. Northumberland & Tyneside Bird Club. 468 pp. ISBN 0-9538839-4-9 £42



We have spent a fair amount of time over the years in Northumberland in winter, mainly (but not exclusively) by the coast so this excellent volume covers an area we know well. It claims (correctly as far as I can tell) to be the first 'county' wintering atlas, and gives a clear picture of what is to be found in the area. There is an introductory section, with photographs, describing the area, the weather over the survey winters (1996-99) and the methodology. Species accounts with tetrad maps for the main species follow them with shorter notes for scarcer species and some detailed appendices (e.g. WEBS counts). Each account also includes a smaller 10km square map and the Northumberland portion of the equivalent map from the Britain & Ireland winter atlas, enabling comparisons to be made. (Suitable cautions are included about problems at the county boundary where Lack's data, of course, includes reports from neighbouring areas.)

I found it all very interesting, and was rapidly able to confirm, for example, that the place to go to see sizeable flocks of Purple Sandpipers is indeed just north of Bamburgh! I also found the map for Nuthatches interesting, in that they are very scarce in the northern part of Northumberland, only two tetrads each having a single bird found within 10 km of the Scottish border. Where did the birds (of this supposedly sedentary species which have now radiated so far out of the Hirsel) come from – and why are they not also to be found just across the Tweed? Certainly I have never come across one in walks down the Till. Indeed, I was slightly surprised that the species discussion did not refer to the Borders birds, particularly as the SE Scotland Breeding Atlas is included in the references.

This is an excellently produced book, the result of much praiseworthy hard work. It will prove fascinating to many members of SOC, particularly those who know the area.

John Davies

The Birds of Morocco. An annotated checklist by Michel Thévenot, Rae Vernon and Patrick Bergier 2003 British Ornithologists' Union and British Ornithologists' Club 594 pp, 76 colour plates Hbk. ISBN 0-907446-25-6

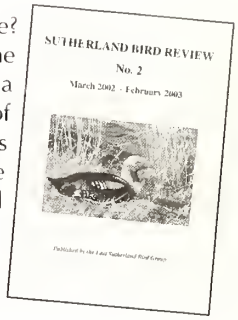
Checklists sound as interesting as that scribbled note your mother gave you when sent on the messages: "3/4 lb mince, tin catfood ..." but this is far more rewarding. Although Morocco has no endemic species – three pairs of Northern Bald Ibis in Syria block this distinction – it has a rich avifauna, combining Mediterranean and north African species with a few birds typical of the sub-Sahara as well as a wealth of European migrants. Combine that with spectacular scenery and a friendly people and it is no wonder that it is a favourite birdwatching destination for northern Europeans.

The bulk of the book consists of a systematic account of the 452 species recorded in Morocco, mostly 1-2 pages per species detailing breeding distribution and numbers, habitat and food, nesting information and migration, winter distribution and ringing recoveries. Visitors who only have a couple of weeks to spend will find the timing information of particular value. Rarities are dealt with at appropriate length – all four goldcrest records are detailed but the now-extinct ostrich merits half a page.

An excellent series of colour habitat photographs gives the feel of the country, although it omits the splendour of downtown Marakkech, which you must not miss! Twenty-two birds, all Moroccan specialities, are superbly illustrated but this book, rightly, does not attempt to be a field-guide. A full gazetteer of all named locations and 65 pages of references suggest the authors' thoroughness although this reviewer has checked neither. From recollection, the price is about £40.

Peter R. Gordon

Sutherland Bird Review 2002-2003 Available from Alan Vittery, 164 West Clyne, Brora, Sutherland, KW9 6NH, price £3.00 (plus 50p postage and packing).



Got £3.00 to spare? Recently, through the letterbox, dropped a booklet just short of 30 pages long. Its name? The Sutherland Bird Review, a mini report compiled by the East Sutherland Bird Group and sold for only £3.00. Set out to run with the seasons and, thereby, running from March 2002 to February 2003, it by-passes the systematic list style.

Come to think of it, the birds run by the seasons and not the human calendar and a bird report is about birds, after all. The records are always the meat of any report but with so few observers the number was always going to be low. None have gone through the sieve of Rarity Committee Assessment but what we do get, however, are records of some impressive birds. Among them are Cory's, Great and Little Shearwaters, coastal Honey Buzzard (with photo) and the original details of the Kinbrace Black Kite. A Woodchat Shrike was the cream on the milk of all the other species.

Transcribed in a readable format, including a note on "Recent Indications of Breeding of Great Northern Diver in Sutherland", it provides a good evening's read. Whilst it could not be regarded as a "classic" report, it is certainly thought provoking. From 2003 there will be a full Highland Bird Report that will encompass all these records but, in the meantime, this small publication is well recommended.

Martin Scott

NOTES & COMMENT

Grey Phalarope in Clyde

This attractive, dunlin-sized wader turned up in Strathclyde Country Park, Motherwell, on 21st Oct. - it should have been well on its way south from its Arctic breeding grounds. Normally, it will winter west of South Africa, out in the Atlantic, quite an oceanic bird. High winds probably forced it off course and inland to land on this Lanarkshire haven. It had the appearance of a tiny gull on the water – being in its silvery winter plumage. (Grey phalaropes are now being called "Red" – the new title apparently to remind us of their brilliant breeding colour).

During its stay, it paddled around on the loch, feeding avidly on surface insects, quickly pecking them up with deft, jerky movements of head and body. This behaviour proved a testing experience for all the photographers who flocked to capture the rarity on film.

Luckily it was totally confiding and ignored all the attention, swimming to within a few feet of the audience.

Obviously unnerved by the Nov. 5th annual fireworks display further up the loch, it left not long after. Our mild weather this year was probably the reason for its extraordinary long stay.

Jimmy Maxwell

Above: *Grey Phalarope. (Lang Stewart)*

Below: *Whites Thrush. (Ross McGregor)*

Whites Thrush on North Ronaldsay

On 17th Oct. 2003, a first winter Whites Thrush was trapped at Holland House gardens on North Ronaldsay, Orkney, at 9.50. In the previous week, several other eastern vagrants had been seen on the island including Lesser Whitethroat of one of the desert races (*minula* or *halimodendri*), 2 Pallas's Warblers, 3 Yellow-browed Warblers and 2 Red-breasted Flycatchers. Other birds trapped that day included 23 Blackbirds, 2 Redwings, 4 Chiffchaffs, 8 Goldcrests, 4 Blackcaps, 12 Robins, and 6 Brambling

The bird was aged as a first winter as the pale tips of the greater coverts extended up the shaft of the feather (see images). A wing length of 169mm, while small for a male and within the range of female, was within the overlap range for the species, so it was impossible to sex.

The bird was seen throughout the 17th but not on the 18th despite searching. However, it was seen again briefly, and for the last time, on the afternoon of the 19th.

Ross McGregor

Leucistic Lapwing

I first saw this leucistic bird in a flock of 350 Lapwings at Kenovay, Tiree on 26 August 2002. I picked it up in flight when the sandy-white upper wing coverts and mantle contrasted strongly with the black flight feathers and black tail patch (leading me to think that it might be a more exciting species....). On the ground, the bird was more obviously a Lapwing with a marked blackish breast-band, typical crest and rusty vent patch, although the crown and most of the upperparts (except for exposed flight feathers and tail patch) were buffy-white.

What was almost certainly the same bird was observed foraging alone on the roadside at Crossapol, Tiree on 2 Feb. 2003 (just 1km south of the August sighting), which is where the bird was photographed. It was not observed subsequently.

John Bowler

VIDEO; *"A taste of" The Birds of Cuba.* 53 min. 20+ endemic species, 19 near or regional endemics plus migrants. £15.00 inc. postage.

CD; *North-East Scotland Digital Bird Reports 1974-1999* inclusive. £25.00 incl. postage. Requires Adobe Acrobat Reader 3 or later (free to download).

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RECENT REPORTS

Autumn 2003 Review

This autumn may go down as one of the best ever for rare birds in Scotland, especially on Shetland where rarities just kept coming, even during their supposed "quiet period" i.e. from mid-October onwards. Indeed the parting shot of the autumn there, was the discovery of an **American Coot** with 2 Coots on the Loch of Clickimin, Lerwick on 30th Nov. This is the first record for Scotland of this somewhat uninspiring "mega" and only the third ever for Britain, after singles in Kent in 1996 and Cumbria in 1999. The first few days of

American Coot, Shetland. (Harry Scott)

December brought no respite, with a **Rufous Turtle Dove** found near Ham (Caithness) on 5th. This bird appeared to be an adult of the form *meena*, so producing the inevitable question – could it be last year's bird that was present on Orkney in Dec returning? Birds found in winter in Scandinavia have returned in future years including one bird in Sweden, which returned every winter between 1985-1994. Another potential first for Scotland was also present in early Dec, having been first seen on 20th Sept, namely a presumed **Redhead**, probably a juvenile female, on Barra (Outer Hebrides).

Presumed Redhead, Outer Hebrides. (Calum Scott)

Siberian Rubythroat, Fair Isle. (Harry Scott)

Shetland this autumn was the place to be though for the rarity enthusiast, with an almost unbelievable list of rare birds there. Pride of place in this list of rare birds must go to the 1st-year **Siberian Rubythroat** and **Savannah Sparrow** both of which were on Fair Isle in Oct. After having largely been out-gunned by the rest of Shetland during September, Fair Isle wasted little time in hitting back and hitting back hard at that. The Savannah Sparrow discovered on 14th Oct remained until the 19th, thus overlapping with the Rubythroat which was present on 17th-19th, the former being the second for Fair Isle and third for Britain, the latter also the second for Fair Isle and fourth for Britain. That out gunning by the rest of Shetland in Sept was epitomised by the 28th Sept, which may go down as the best single day for rarities ever on Shetland. Amongst birds found on that day were a **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** on Whalsay(which remained until 4th Oct), a **Red-flanked Bluetail** on Fetlar and a **White's Thrush** at Scatness. In Oct, further Bluetails were at Denburn Wood (Fife) on 15th-17th and on Fair Isle on 16th and another White's Thrush was on North Ronaldsay on 17th-19th. The numbers of what, only ten years ago, were considered to be extremely rare birds that marked this autumn were in sharp contrast to the very few common migrants being seen anywhere. If you weren't looking at a rarity or scarcity this autumn you probably weren't looking at any migrants at all. Ten **Citrine Wagtails** were seen in Sept and Oct all on Shetland apart from singles on Barra and North Ronaldsay. Three or four **Pechora Pipits** were reported, a probable at Kergord (Shetland) on 28th Sept, one on Fair Isle on 5th-14th Oct, on Foula (Shetland) on 8th-15th Oct and at Helendale, Lerwick (Shetland) on 14th-17th Oct. The only **Red-throated Pipit** was one seen briefly on Fair Isle on 17th Sept, while 11 **Olive-backed Pipits** were seen on Shetland between 29th Sept-6th Nov. In Sept, a remarkable eight **Lanceolated Warblers** were seen, five different on Fair Isle, one on the Out Skerries on 30th – 3rd Oct and singles on North Ronaldsay on 8th and Sanday on 29th – the second and third records for Orkney. A **Savi's Warbler**, on Fair Isle on 30th Sept,

Savannah Sparrow, Fair Isle. (Hugh Harrop, www.hughharrop.com)

was trapped and found to be the eastern form *fusca* and first ever Scottish autumn record as well as being only the ninth ever for Scotland.

No fewer than eight **Blyth's Reed Warblers** were seen this autumn with non-Shetland singles on the Isle of May, North Ronaldsay and Barra - the last named island also playing host to a **Paddyfield Warbler** on 26th-27th Sept (first record for the Outer Hebrides). On Shetland, one on Foula on 29th Sept-8th Oct that was then re-found and trapped at Kergord on 11th-12th Oct, and another on Fair Isle on 14th Oct. Three **Booted Warblers** reached Shetland in Sept between the 14th-20th with single **Sykes's Warblers** on North Ronaldsay on 29th Sept-

Booted Warbler, Shetland (above) and Pechora Pipit, Fair Isle (below). (both by Hugh Harrop, www.hughharrop.com)

1st Oct and on Unst (Shetland) on 4th-9th Oct. Single **Subalpine Warblers** were on Unst on 28th Sept and Bressay on 30th Sept (both Shetland), while eight **Arctic Warblers** were seen on Orkney and Shetland all between 1st-20th Sept apart from one on Fetlar on 1st-10th Oct. The only **Radde's Warbler** was on Fair Isle on 13th Oct, whilst contrastingly six **Dusky Warblers** were seen on Shetland between 14th Oct-8th Nov with one on South Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 9th-15th Nov. Also in Nov, four **Hume's Yellow-browed Warblers** were reported: at Denburn Wood (Fife) on 11th, singles on Fair Isle on 13th-14th and 17th-23rd and one on Bressay on 13th-23rd. November also produced several rare Wheatears with three **Desert Wheatears** seen: showy females at Kilminning on 10th-15th (the first record for Fife), Girdle Ness (Aberdeen) on 12th-15th and a male briefly at Gulberwick (Shetland) on 14th. A **Pied Wheatear**, a female, was on North Ronaldsay on 17th-26th with another, a 1st-winter male, seen in Oct near Collieston (Aberdeenshire) on 25th-28th.

Desert Wheatear, North-East Scotland. (Harry Scott)

Back to Shetland though and in Oct a 1st-winter **Red-throated (Taiga) Flycatcher** at Dales Lees on 13th-16th is the first record for Scotland and only the second British record of this recent officially recognised species that was formerly considered conspecific with Red-breasted Flycatcher. Three **Black-throated Thrushes** were seen on Shetland in Oct between 9th-18th on Foula, Fair Isle and at Brae, while a **Pine Bunting** was at Haroldswick, Unst on 31st Oct-1st Nov. Only two **Rustic Buntings** were seen in Sept on Foula and on Barra, with four **Yellow-breasted Buntings** seen in Sept, on Fair Isle, North Ronaldsay (2) and at Sumburgh Head (Shetland). An **Isabelline Shrike** was found dead on the Out Skerries on 1st Oct whilst three **Woodchat Shrikes** were seen: one (probably of the eastern form *niloticus*) at Maywick (Shetland) on 8th-17th Sept, on North Ronaldsay on 16th-23rd Sept and on Barra on 1st-2nd Oct. The "discovery" of Barra as a prime migration site was made last autumn and the same observers made sure that this year it continued to be a more than ample rival to the Northern Isles.

Indeed Barra played its part in one of the best autumns ever for Nearctic passerines in Scotland with a **Red-eyed Vireo** there on 5th-7th Oct (seventh record for Scotland). Nearby on South Uist there was a **Blackpoll Warbler** at Snishival on 17th-20th Oct (fifth record for Scotland) whilst on Orkney, a **Myrtle Warbler** in Evie on 31st Oct-2nd Nov, the sixth record for Scotland and second for Orkney. Shetland, in Sept, had

Red-eyed Vireo, Outer Hebrides (top). (Jim Dickson)
Myrtle Warbler, Orkney (bottom). (Stuart Williams)

both **Grey-cheeked Thrush**, on Foula on 27th-29th and **Swainson's Thrush** on Unst on 27th-30th with remarkably a second Swainson's Thrush on Unst, at Burrafirth on 15th Oct. It wasn't a vintage autumn for Nearctic waders though the highlight for many mainland birdwatchers in Sept was the juv **Baird's Sandpiper** at Threipmuir Reservoir (Lothian) on 6th-16th with another in Sept on Foula on 1st-6th. Also in Sept a juv **Lesser Yellowlegs** was at Loch of Tankerness on 3rd-4th with a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** on North Ronaldsay on 29th-2nd Oct and another on Whalsay (Shetland) on 2nd-6th Oct. Four 1st-winter **White-rumped Sandpipers** were seen in a mini influx in Oct, two each on the Outer Hebrides and Shetland whilst no fewer than eight **American Golden Plovers** were reported from Shetland (3), Orkney, Outer Hebrides, Aberdeenshire, Fife and Argyll. **Pectoral Sandpipers** had a great autumn with 15+ seen in Sept including 5+ at RSPB Loch of

Solitary Sandpiper, Outer Hebrides. (Martin Scott)

Strathbeg on 9th, four seen in Oct and in Nov one still at Gladhouse Reservoir (Lothian) on 4th. Perhaps the star waders though were the juv **Pacific Golden Plover** on the Ythan Estuary (Aberdeenshire) on 2nd-16th Nov and **Solitary Sandpiper** at Gravir, Lewis on 23rd-25th, the second record for the Outer Hebrides and only the fourth for Scotland. A **Great Snipe** was on Out Skerries (Shetland) on 20th Sept with in Oct a probable on Barra on 9th and one was at Noss Head (Caithness) on 16th. Only two **Grey Phalaropes** were reported in Sept though 50 were seen in Oct including 15 off Murkle (Caithness) on 8th and six off Balgarva, South Uist (Outer Hebrides) on 10th whilst inland a very popular typically confiding 1st-winter was at Strathclyde Loch (Lanarkshire) from 21st–6th Nov.

The best sea watching to be had was probably on North Ronaldsay where in Sept a **Brünnich's Guillemot** was reported passing on the 24th, a **Great Shearwater** was seen on the 1st, single **Cory's Shearwaters** passed

Pectoral Sandpiper, North-East Scotland. (Harry Scott)

Baird's Sandpiper, Lothian. (Mark Darling)

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on the 1st and 24th and a presumed **Fea's Petrel** was seen on the 15th. Another Great Shearwater was seen off Fife Ness on 5th Sept whilst three other Cory's were reported in Sept. 20 **Sabine's Gulls** were reported in Sept with 14 in Oct whilst generally only low numbers of **Leach's Petrels** were seen, 18 off Uisaed Point (Argyll) on10th Oct being the largest count. An adult **Gull-billed Tern** was reported from Wyre Sound (Orkney) on 24th-28th Sept, an adult **White-billed Diver** was again off Kirkabister (Shetland) on17th-18th Nov and the popular summering male **Snowy Owl** was still present until the end of Oct at least.

Waxwings, Argyll. (Jim Duncan)

A **Waxwing** invasion took place during Oct with 700+ from the 19th and then perhaps 1000+ birds seen in Nov with most birds around Aberdeen, Edinburgh and in Fife including counts of 300+ in both Kirkcaldy and Sighthill, Edinburgh. An influx of **Common Redpolls** took place during late Sept and Oct, mostly in Shetland, with most if not all of the birds likely to be of Icelandic origin. Amongst this influx were 13 **Arctic Redpolls**, all, apart from one on North Ronaldsay, on Shetland between 22nd Sept-1st Nov - all the birds found dead or trapped were of the Greenland form *hornemanni*.

Amongst scarcities, several species had a fantastic autumn with 45 **Pallas's Warblers** seen on 11th Oct-17th Nov including 3 at Auchmithie (Angus) on 17th Oct, one at Kildary (Highland) on 18th-19th Oct and one reported at Urquhart on 20th Oct that will be the first record for Moray if accepted. As for **Yellow-browed Warbler**, up to 100 were reported in Sept from the 11th, including 15 on Fair Isle alone on 30th. 120+ were seen in Oct, 80+ of which were on Shetland and five were reported between 1st-23rd Nov - at times it was the commonest migrant on Shetland this autumn. **Great Grey Shrike** also showed up well with 10+ in Oct from the 14th and eight reported from Nov. 50+ **Common Rosefinches** were seen in Sept including 15 different on Fair Isle whilst a very late one was at Rendall (Orkney) on 23rd Nov. 23 **Richard's Pipits** were reported including in Oct one at Troon on 13th (first Ayrshire record if accepted) and in Nov one

Melodious Warbler, Outer Hebrides. (Stuart Rivers)

at Spiggie on 22nd the latest ever on Shetland. The latest ever **Barred Warbler** to be seen on Shetland was on Out Skerries on 7th Nov with an even later one at Aberlady Bay (Lothian) on 20th (the first record for the reserve) whilst in Sept 50+ were seen including 15 different on Fair Isle and 20+ were reported in Oct. Three **Melodious Warblers** were reported, two on Orkney and one on Barra on 1st-12th Oct also seven **Marsh Warblers** in Sept/Oct. 20+ **Red-breasted Flycatchers** were seen in Sept including four on Fair Isle on 20th, 18+ were logged in Oct and two were seen in the first week of Nov. Two **Short-toed Larks** were seen on Shetland with a **Wood Lark** on Fair Isle in Nov, also eight **Hoopoes** were seen. **Ortolan Buntings** were on Fair Isle on 5th-18th Sept and at Fife Ness (Fife) on 18th-19th Oct, nine **Little Buntings** were reported all on Orkney and Shetland apart from one on Barra on 9th Oct and six **Rosy Starlings** were reported, two each in Sept, Oct and Nov.

Rosy Starling, North-East Scotland. (Ian Hastie)

There are many more highlights to mention in what was a truly outstanding autumn for rare and scarce birds in Scotland. Hopefully the above gives some indication as to how memorable it was.

Angus Murray (BirdLine Scotland)

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Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year at the beginning of March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editor at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

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